National Library of Canada
Bibliothèque nationale du Canada

Canadian Theses Service
Services des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0N4

CANADIAN THESES
THÈSES CANADIENNES

NOTICE

The quality of this microfiche is heavily dependent upon the quality of the original thesis submitted for microfilming. Every effort has been made to ensure the highest quality of reproduction possible.

If pages are missing, contact the university which granted the degree.

Some pages may have indistinct print especially if the original pages were typed with a poor typewriter ribbon or if the university sent us an inferior photocopy.

Previously copyrighted materials (journal articles, published tests, etc.) are not filmed.

Reproduction in full or in part of this film is governed by the Canadian Copyright Act, R.S.C. 1970, c. C-30. Please read the authorization forms which accompany this thesis.

AVIS

La qualité de cette microfiche dépend grandement de la qualité de la thèse soumise au microfilmage. Nous avons tout fait pour assurer une qualité supérieure de reproduction.

S'il manque des pages, veuillez communiquer avec l'université qui a conféré le grade.

La qualité d'impression de certaines pages peut laisser à désirer, surtout si les pages originales ont été dactylographiées à l'aide d'un ruban usé ou si l'université nous a fait parvenir une photocopie de qualité inférieure.

Les documents qui font déjà l'objet d'un droit d'auteur (articles de revue, examens publiés, etc.) ne sont pas microfilmés.

La reproduction, même partielle, de ce microfilm est soumise à la Loi canadienne sur le droit d'auteur, SRC 1970, c. C-30. Veuillez prendre connaissance des formules d'autorisation qui accompagnent cette thèse.

THIS DISSERTATION
HAS BEEN MICROFILMED
EXACTLY AS RECEIVED

LA THÈSE A ÉTÉ
MICROFILMÉE TELLE QUE
NOUS L'AVONS REÇUE

NL 339 (r. 86/01)

Canada

87

National Library of Canada
Bibliothèque nationale du Canada

0-315-26820-4

Canadian Theses Division
Division des thèses canadiennes

Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0N4

PERMISSION TO MICROFILM — AUTORISATION DE MICROFILMER

• Please print or type — Écrire en lettres moulées ou dactylographier

Full Name of Author — Nom complet de l'auteur

Conni Louise Massing

Date of Birth — Date de naissance	Country of Birth — Lieu de naissance
November 20, 1958	Canada

Permanent Address — Résidence fixe

Box 783, Ponoka, Alberta T0C 2H0

Title of Thesis — Titre de la thèse

NORA AT DAYBREAK

University — Université

University of Alberta

Degree for which thesis was presented — Grade pour lequel cette thèse fut présentée

Master of Fine Arts

Year this degree conferred — Année d'obtention de ce grade	Name of Supervisor — Nom du directeur de thèse
1983	Ben Tarver

Permission is hereby granted to the NATIONAL LIBRARY OF CANADA to microfilm this thesis and to lend or sell copies of the film.

The author reserves other publication rights, and neither the thesis nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.

L'autorisation est, par la présente, accordée à la BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE DU CANADA de microfilmer cette thèse et de prêter ou de vendre des exemplaires du film.

L'auteur se réserve les autres droits de publication; ni la thèse ni de longs extraits de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans l'autorisation écrite de l'auteur.

Date	Signature
October 14, 1983	Conni Massing

NL-91 (4/77)

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

NORA AT DAYBREAK

by

CONNI L. MASSING

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE

OF MASTER OF FINE ARTS

IN

PLAYWRITING

DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA

EDMONTON, ALBERTA

FALL, 1983

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

RELEASE FORM

NAME OF AUTHOR: Conni L. Massing

TITLE OF THESIS: Nora at Daybreak

DEGREE FOR WHICH THESIS WAS PRESENTED: Master of Fine Arts

YEAR THIS DEGREE GRANTED: 1983

Permission is hereby granted to THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA LIBRARY to reproduce single copies of this thesis and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly or scientific research purposes only.

The author reserves other publication rights, and neither the thesis nor extensive extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's written permission.

(Signed) Conni Massing

PERMANENT ADDRESS:

#212, 10147-108 Street

Edmonton, Alberta

DATED October 12 1983

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, viewed, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis production of Nora at Daybreak submitted by Conni Massing in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of M.F.A. in Playwriting.

Ben Tarver

Supervisor

Committee Member

Committee Member

May 18, 1982

Date

ABSTRACT

Nora at Daybreak is a play about lost chances and unfulfilled dreams. It also deals with family love and responsibility in the relationship of John to his sister, Eve, and his nephew, Boxer. John has reached a turning point in his life. He has lost his job and his wife in quick succession and has few regrets about either one. He plans to buy an airplane in order to rekindle his World War II flying aspirations, and he has decided to sell the family house to support this scheme. The central image of the play, however, is the wood sculpture John is building in his backyard. As the sculpture takes shape, so do the tensions and conflicts in the play. The more absorbed John becomes with building his monument, the more his family forces him to affect their lives. Eve resists his flying plans and is opposed to the sale of the family home. She tries all the conventional means of stopping John, with little success. She is forced to reveal some of her own lost dreams in an attempt to drag John back to the present. Boxer is not only entirely supportive of John's plans but demands support and a blessing for his own dream of going to art school. While longing for a different future, John is haunted by the past. He sees Boxer as himself in the dim shadows of the memory scenes, and recalls the days when he was at the threshold of realizing his own dreams. John must face the responsibility of Boxer's worship and Eve's love. He "fails" Boxer by forcing him to make his own decision. He fails

Eve when he does acknowledge her love for him. Finally, he must acknowledge his own limitations and possibilities, accept the lost chances, and salvage the love and respect of his family.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Ben Tarver, Dr. Fred Radford, Gordon Peacock, Brian Deedrick, Dave Billington, Wendell Smith, Elyn Ross Gibson, Grant Carmichael, Cheryl Heikel, Northern Light Theatre, Alex Hawkins, Michael McKinlay, Gordon Macdonald, Eve Barry, Keltie Stearman.

DEDICATION

For Ed and Vi and Uncle Roy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PAGE

NORA AT DAYBREAK.....1

BIBLIOGRAPHY.....86

APPENDIX A: THE WORKSHOP PROCESS.....88

N O R A A T D A Y B R E A K

Conni L. Massing
#212, 10147-108 Street
Edmonton, Alberta
January 1, 1983

CAST OF CHARACTERS

JOHN MORGAN.....59 years old.

EVE DENNISON.....57 years old. JOHN's sister.

BOXER DENNISON.....20 years old. EVE's son.

YOUNG JOHN.....17-24 years old. This part is played by actor playing role of BOXER.

YOUNG EVE.....15-22 years old.

SETTING.....John Morgan's backyard.

TIME.....Act One: October 31, 1980.

Act Two: November 11, 1980.

ACT ONE

The action takes place in JOHN MORGAN's backyard. The space is dominated by his work area where there is a good deal of old, gnarled dead birch in various stages of preparation. There are many tools spread about the area and a large messy stack of provisions: pop cans, empty and full, cups, bottles, paper, newspapers, blankets and an ice bucket. There are also several stumps large enough to sit on and a work bench. There are also the usual trappings of a backyard, wheelbarrow and perhaps an old wicker garden seat. The boundaries of the space may be delineated by the remains of a picket fence and, upstage, two or three large trees. There is no need for greenery on the set as the action takes place in late fall. EVE and BOXER enter from a well-worn path downstage of JOHN's work area. There is also an upstage entrance, from around the side of the house. The house is not represented on stage. The memory scenes take place around the backyard, with the only restriction being that they do not infringe upon JOHN's work area. The play begins with a memory scene, observed by JOHN.

The sound of big band jazz drifts into JOHN's work area. JOHN stops to listen as lights fade up slowly on memory area.

YOUNG EVE is alone in the memory area. She is humming to herself and dancing, arms up and hands placed on the shoulders of an imaginary dance partner. She tries the step two or three times and then breaks into the song while continuing to practice the step. YOUNG JOHN enters. He watches YOUNG EVE, smiling. She doesn't notice him. There is a carafe of wine and two glasses beside EVE. JOHN bursts into enthusiastic applause.

YOUNG JOHN (imitating a radio announcer)
Yes folks...the inimitable vocal styling of Eve Morgan. And now she's going to favour us with another number from the same album... Old Rugged Cross.

YOUNG EVE (laughing)
Are you sure you don't want to hear something just a little more upbeat?

YOUNG JOHN
What did you have in mind?

YOUNG EVE
Chateau Morgan...1938...

(YOUNG EVE points to the wine.)

YOUNG JOHN
How did you get that past Mom?

YOUNG EVE
She went out.

YOUNG JOHN
I didn't know you knew any drinking songs, Eve.

YOUNG EVE
It's for a toast, idiot. I had a singing lesson today and Mr. Bessel said I was magnificent.

YOUNG JOHN
If we had a drink every time that happened we'd be...

YOUNG EVE
He said he'd find me a teacher in the city. We're set.

YOUNG JOHN
<u>You're</u> set...

YOUNG EVE
Well I don't want to spend another winter here. Let's go now. We'll make it a New Year's resolution to be famous.

YOUNG JOHN
Whoa...aren't you going to finish school first?

YOUNG EVE
What for? You're the one with the "head on your shoulders". I'm just terribly talented.

YOUNG JOHN

Now hold it...

YOUNG EVE

I peeked at the painting. It's lovely.

YOUNG JOHN

It's not finished yet.

YOUNG EVE

That's alright. We can still celebrate. To your success and my brilliance.

(YOUNG EVE pours the wine and hands YOUNG JOHN a glass. They lift their glasses in the toast.)

YOUNG JOHN

Wait, stick your finger in my drink.

YOUNG EVE

What?

YOUNG JOHN

Dip your finger in my wine. I do the same. Then we drink.

YOUNG EVE

Is this like signing in blood?

YOUNG JOHN

Yes. Now it's an omen as well as a toast. Link arms.

(YOUNG JOHN and YOUNG EVE link arms. There is a brief uncomfortable moment.)

YOUNG EVE

To the future. A fast train and a big city.

(The two bow their heads to drink as the noise of a radio news broadcast fades into the scene. YOUNG JOHN breaks away from the toast.

YOUNG EVE

What's the matter?

YOUNG JOHN

News is on.

YOUNG EVE
What about the toast, John? And the omen?

YOUNG JOHN
There's going to be a war.

YOUNG EVE
There's going to be a war. And I'm going to sing in New York... and you're...

YOUNG JOHN
I mean it, Eve.

YOUNG EVE (hurt)
I meant it too.

YOUNG JOHN
Shhhh...

(YOUNG EVE exits after a moment, singly loudly.)

(Lights brighten on JOHN, who is standing in his work area watching the memory scene. He hums distractedly, a few notes from the song YOUNG EVE has been singing and then catches himself, stops. He begins, rather determined, to sing his own song as if to drive out the echoes of EVE's song.)

JOHN (singing)
Ada Riley...had a...wart!
Ada Riley...was that sort of girl...

(JOHN continues to whistle the tune he has been singing and turns to his work. He picks a piece of wood, looks at it long and hard and begins to chip and smooth the bark. He speaks -- half to himself and half to the wood.)

Nothing short of a rescue, I hope you realize.

(Pause. Rummages through his pile of provisions for a tool. Continues working.)

JOHN

You could have had a sad or humiliating end at the hands of someone more practical than myself.

(Singing.)

I think that I shall never see...

(Stops. Chuckles. Regards the piece of wood with something close to affection.)

Could have been a church pew...yes...a sinner's hot plate. Or a cutting board or a garage or a kitchen chair. Firewood.

(Pause.)

Or a bunch of goddamn popsicle sticks.

(Sings.)

I think that I shall never see...Ada Riley's wart.

(Pause.)

Clean and grey and dead. Leaves gone off to your children's children. Does that make you a grandfather or does that make you a dead tree?

(Chuckles to himself.)

Never you mind. Maybe you'll be reincarnated as a perennial... a rose bush. On the other hand you might end up as a sweet potatoe.

(Continues working for a few moments.)

Maybe I'll be recycled too. You and me...we'll get ourselves recycled.

EVE (offstage)

John! John, you out here?

(JOHN smiles to himself, grabs a piece of the wood and slumps down among his pile of provisions. He picks an empty rye bottle out of the pile and throws it into view. He then proceeds to do an imitation of a very sentimental old drunk.)

JOHN
He was soaring above the clouds like a silver bird when they got him captain...

(EVE has entered and she stops and watches, horrified.)

They shot him out of the sky and he went down like a shooting star... all sparks and flames...Nothing left but a burnt spot on the grass.

(A heart-rending sob.)

That and the memory of his laughing eyes. Such laughing eyes he had, captain...Like my sister Eve.

(EVE is suspicious now.)

EVE
John...

JOHN
And such laughing legs.

EVE
I think you're pulling one of my laughing legs.

JOHN
Great bleeding Jesus! It's Ada Riley.

EVE (laughing)
Now, you're not that far gone.

JOHN
Oh, good morning, Eve.

EVE
All that for my benefit?

JOHN
Come now. Don't you know a flashback when you see one?

EVE
Well I guess I'll know for next time. What are you doing up to this time of the morning?

JOHN (gravely)
Vespers.

EVE

Vespers.

JOHN

And you?

EVE

Oh, I couldn't sleep. They're tearing up that road back of the house again. I don't know why they bother...no one ever uses it but the kids on their bikes.

JOHN

Well now, I imagine they're doing it because they know it annoys you.

EVE

Wouldn't surprise me. I might have been able to put up with that but then I discovered your "handiwork". Are you going to explain... or are you...

JOHN

You want a drink? Bacon and eggs? Coffee? Or do you want me to lead you in prayer?

EVE

I'll have a chair if you've got one.

(JOHN finds a suitable piece of wood for EVE.)

JOHN

So did you get all your guests tucked in and fed up? 'Course I don't know if Harold's ever fed up. Lord, that man can pack it away.

EVE

What would you call those little pictures you drew, John? Caricatures? Comic strips? Honestly, you'd think you were nine years old. Waiting till everybody's gone to bed and then tacking mean little pictures to their doors. And to make matters worse you tacked Alice's picture to Harold's door. Why did you have to draw them with such big noses?

JOHN

Because they have big noses. Are you giving them breakfast too or did they leave mad?

EVE

I already took the cartoons down and yes I'm giving them breakfast.

JOHN

Why did you do it, Eve?

EVE

I didn't want to have to explain the silly things. I kept them if that's what you're worried about.

JOHN

No, Eve. Why'd you put out the red alert for all the relatives? Guess I know why. Guess they wanted to have a look at me to see if I've grown fangs since Joyce left.

EVE

That is not why...

JOHN

It was wonderful pot roast but you shouldn't have gone to the trouble. We could have set up some telephone interviews or a chain-letter.

EVE

It was your choice to be the centre of attention! I had that dinner planned weeks ago! After you lost your job and before you lost your wife if you want to know exactly.

JOHN

I don't believe you.

EVE

You believe it.

JOHN (after a pause)

Pretty high turn-out for a pot roast.

EVE

Maybe it was the pie, then. Did it ever occur to you that they wanted to see you because they care?

JOHN

I guess curiosity is the better part of concern.

(Pause.)

But that still doesn't explain why you're over here when you should be busy roasting a pig for Harold. You shouldn't be curious. Christ, I've seen more of you in the last three weeks than I have in 20 years.

EVE

I'll have that drink now.

JOHN

Now, Eve. You don't really want...

EVE

How would you know what I really want? And I might have meant almost anything...juice, coffee...

JOHN

Will a rye do you?

EVE

Yes.

(JOHN digs through his pile of supplies and retrieves a glass and a mickey of rye whiskey. He pours a drink for EVE. JOHN turns to his work. EVE takes a sip as if to steady herself and nearly chokes in the process.)

I overheard your conversation with Harold last night.

JOHN

Cousin Harold should be overlooked, not overheard.

EVE

I heard you tell him that you were going to sell the house.

JOHN (considering a piece of wood)

Hmmmm...

EVE

John! Why did you tell him that?

JOHN

He offered me a job between bites of pie last night...

EVE

What did you say?

JOHN

Told him I didn't know if I could manage the responsibility of being a shipping clerk. And then I told him that it would be a while before I'd have to come begging because I was planning on selling the house.

EVE

And are you?

JOHN

Yep.

EVE (after a pause)

Do you have any gingerale?

JOHN

Are you sure you don't want breakfast?

EVE

Why should I want breakfast? I haven't been to sleep either.

JOHN

Do you mind if it's warm?

(EVE shakes her head. JOHN throws her a can of gingerale.)

EVE

I've been up all night worrying about this house business.

JOHN

Nothing to worry about...

EVE

I grew up in this house too, John. And I think it's pretty... damned ridiculous if you're going to sell it just because you don't want to be beholdin' to Harold...or to anyone else.

JOHN

Have to admit you've got my attention. I can't remember when I last heard you damn anyone or anything...

EVE

Maybe you just weren't listening...

JOHN

And "beholding". Another rare, dirty word.

EVE

Don't you mock me, John.

JOHN

Alright, Eve. Why don't we start again?

(Pause.)

JOHN

I'm selling the house.

EVE

Then I'm buying it.

JOHN

You can't afford it.

EVE

George's life insurance is just sitting in the bank.

JOHN

Eve, Eve...no. I need the money for...a special project which I'm pretty sure you don't want to finance.

EVE

I'll buy the house and you can stay with Boxer and me. It'll save us wearing out a path between the two places.

JOHN

No, Eve.

EVE

Or we could all move into this house. I've never liked that old barn I'm in anyway.

(JOHN turns abruptly and cuts himself with the knife he's been working with.)

JOHN

Don't get carried away, Eve. You don't even know what I want the money for.

EVE

You've cut yourself.

(EVE pulls a handkerchief out of her pocket and approaches JOHN. She begins to dab at his finger.)

JOHN

No blood before breakfast, hey?

EVE (uneasily)

Hold still.

(JOHN pulls away from her.)

JOHN
Here, I'll put my finger in your drink, disinfect the cut.

(JOHN dips his finger in EVE's drink.)

Now you have to take a drink...as a sign of trust.

(EVE looks at JOHN, smiles uncertainly and raises the glass to her lips. JOHN quickly takes the glass away from her, dumps the contents.)

It's not fair unless you know what you're agreeing to. I'm selling the house because I need the money. I need the money because I'm taking up flying again.

(Long pause.)

EVE
You...are doing what?

JOHN
It's almost cheaper to buy a plane these days than it is to rent one. Either way, it's going to cost me a pile. Then, of course, I'll need some notebooks, some manuals and maybe a crash helmet.

(Pause. He chuckles.)

I figure the house ought to bring in about sixty thousand or more. Place is starting to get to me anyway. It's like walking around in an old silent movie. The floor squeaks and sings like I'm walking on graves. And I keep having these damn dreams...

EVE
I try to mind my own business, John. I have been trying to watch and not say anything. You have been whittling away out here for how long? Almost two weeks. Dragging dead wood into the yard. Chipping, carving, drawing pictures of the wood. Drawing pictures of your family. Staying up nights bent over old logs. And now you tell me you're going to fly.

JOHN
I <u>have</u> to do this, Eve. But I <u>want</u> to fly.

EVE
If you think I'm going to let you sell the house for some crazy scheme that you're never going to carry out anyway...

JOHN
I had a talk with Ernie that works out at the airport. I talked to him yesterday.

EVE
I don't believe you.

JOHN (fiercely)
You believe it!

BOXER (offstage)
John! You out here?

JOHN
Round the back, Boxer!

(BOXER runs in, carrying a big bag.)

BOXER
Morning, John. Hi, Mom. What are you doing over here, anyway?

JOHN
The county sent in some earthmovers to wake her up.

BOXER
Yeah? I never heard anything. You better get back there. Harold's making noise about breakfast and Alice doesn't know how to work the coffee-maker. Vera's looking through all your cupboards...

EVE
Alright, Boxer. I get the idea.

BOXER
I saw the drawings last night when I got home. That one of Harold was great. It looked like he was storing all his pie in his cheeks. Did you take them down, Mom? No one said anything about it this morning.

EVE
And no one's going to either.

BOXER
Okay, I get the idea. Anyway, here's the costume. Can't wait to see you in this get-up, John.

JOHN
Costume?

EVE
Don't play dumb, John. The Hallowe'en dance at the Elks club.

JOHN
So?

EVE
John, you promised you'd come.

BOXER
Are you really going to sell the house, John?

EVE (exasperated)
Enough already, Boxer. You've brought the costume, now why don't you get back to the house and guard the kitchen?

BOXER
Yes ma'am.

EVE
And I'll see you at lunch.

JOHN
I'll see you after lunch!

BOXER
Shhh, now. The backyard has ears.

(BOXER exits, laughing.)

EVE
Why do I always feel like there's some kind of conspiracy going on between you two?

JOHN
Come by after lunch and we'll teach you the handshake.

EVE
Maybe he finds you easier to talk to because you've never given him a spanking. Or an allowance.

JOHN
Well then, I guess he has nothing to lose and nothing to gain.

EVE
Sometimes I'm not so sure about that.

JOHN
What's that supposed to mean?

EVE
Have you told him about the flying?

JOHN
You were the first to know.

EVE
I always seem to get <u>that</u> honour. Has he talked to you about art school?

JOHN
Not really.

EVE
Then I wish you'd talk to him. And I wish you'd hold off telling him about flying.

JOHN
Why?

EVE
One thing at a time, that's all.

JOHN (after a pause)
I'll probably tell him what I damn well please. And he'll probably do the same. And if he wants to go to art school he'll do that too.

EVE
John, there's more to it than that and you know it.

JOHN
I'll talk to him about art school, Eve. I'd buy the damn place if that was what he wanted. But I won't make any promises about flying.

EVE
The interview's next week. I want to make sure he goes through with it.

JOHN
And I have a birthday coming up, don't I?

EVE
Afraid so.

JOHN
It's a cruel trick having a birthday on Remembrance Day. Come here. I want to show you something.

(John puts his arm around EVE and points to the sky.)

JOHN
See that cloud up there? The one shaped like a grin? That's where I'll be on my birthday.

EVE (pulling away)
Not if I can help it, John.

JOHN (holding her)
Do you think it'll still be there on my birthday? Do you think that cloud'll still be there?

EVE
Why, John? After all these years? Why would you want to do this? It's crazy.

JOHN
I can do anything I want now, can't I? Sell the house, buy the farm, write penpals, whittle away my time...

EVE
Is it because of Joyce? Is that why you want to sell the house?

JOHN
It has nothing to do with her. I couldn't even remember the smell of her damn perfume five minutes after she left. You should know better than that...

EVE
Then there's no reason...

JOHN
It's too late now. The wheels are in motion. I've turned down a generous offer of employment, informed my next of kin and I even wrote a letter to Nora.

EVE
Now what's that supposed to mean?

JOHN
It should mean something to you, Eve. But don't worry about it yet. I have many things to do before I go. Before my birthday.

(JOHN sits down with a piece of wood, a knife and whistles loudly.)

EVE
And how old will you be, John? How old and wise will you be?

(JOHN ignores EVE. She stares at him for a long moment, starts to speak, thinks better of it. She exits. JOHN throws a tool down in frustration.)

JOHN
You can't stop me!

(Pause.)

When was the last time you sabotaged an airplane, Eve?

It's inevitable. In..evitable.
In...Eve...able.

(Pause.)

And how old will I be?

(JOHN shakes his head in disgust and turns to his work area. A slow smile crosses his face. He picks up a piece of wood and stares at the end of it. He makes a great show of counting the rings.

Christ, between the two of us, we're damn near petrified.

(JOHN laughes to himself, carries the wood back to where he has been working at it. Stares at it, crouches down amidst the pile of wood.)

If I can just get you safely bolted down...I can take off.

(Sound of radio, music, drifts into the area, dreamlike.)

Turn the damn radio off!

(JOHN stops, startled.)

(Softly) Jesus...

(Lights fade up on memory scene. YOUNG JOHN is pacing back and forth reading a story from a well-used magazine, chuckling to himself occasionally. YOUNG EVE enters with a muffin with a lit candle on it.)

YOUNG EVE (singing)
Happy birthday...to you...

(YOUNG JOHN hides the magazine and blows out the candle.)

YOUNG JOHN
Just one candle?

YOUNG EVE
One fifth of a century.

YOUNG JOHN
Ahhhh...I see. Thank you, Nora.

YOUNG EVE
What? John, what are you reading?

YOUNG JOHN
I heard you reading this out loud to yourself. More than once. I thought I'd see what all the fuss was about.

YOUNG EVE
You never heard any such thing.

YOUNG JOHN
Careful! That's my birthday cake you're waving around!

YOUNG EVE
Give me that magazine!

YOUNG JOHN
I'm not finished yet.

YOUNG EVE
If you think I don't have any way of getting back at you for this, you'd better think again.

YOUNG JOHN
Ahhhh...the loving trust between brother and sister is a sacred thing.

YOUNG EVE
Only up to a point. And then I start telling tales on you.

YOUNG JOHN
Who'd listen?

(He reads from the story.)

Her azure eyes flickered and glowed in the waning...

YOUNG EVE
It's not surprising that I can only think of one person that's even remotely interested...but that one person would be fascinated.

JOHN
One word to Joyce, I'll make you so sorry...

YOUNG EVE
Maybe I will and maybe I won't...

YOUNG JOHN
Mind you, I just thought of a real lulu I could spring on George! And it's not even true!

YOUNG EVE
Some sacred trust!

(YOUNG JOHN clears his throat to read.)

Oh go ahead. I'm not listening.

YOUNG JOHN
Hmmmm...even the title sends shivers up and down my spine. Nora at Daybreak...or is it Nora at Milking Time?

YOUNG EVE (making a grab for the magazine)
John...

YOUNG JOHN
Her azure eyes flickered and glowed in the waning light. As she parted her red, red lips...a symphony of sound burst forth. It was the last time he ever saw her...but he saw her name...Nora... emblazoned on the billboards and bright light signs...a burning emblem of her shining success...a dream fulfilled. "Songbird of Broadway". Oh that's rich...songbird...

(The crackling noises of a radio news broadcast are heard. YOUNG JOHN stops abruptly, drops the magazine and runs to radio.)

YOUNG EVE
Least you could have done is finish it.

YOUNG JOHN
Shhhh! News is on.

YOUNG EVE (fiercely)
I don't want to hear the news. I don't want to hear about Germany or Poland or the North Pole for that matter!

YOUNG JOHN
Well I do.

YOUNG EVE
You didn't even make a wish on your candle.

YOUNG JOHN
Don't have to. Everything's perfect.

YOUNG EVE (excited)
Did Mr. Ferron give you the job?

YOUNG JOHN
He might have if I'd asked him for it.

YOUNG EVE
What are we going to do for money if you don't work there?

YOUNG JOHN
Listen to the radio and pray for rain. Listen to the radio and then sit around and wait for the next broadcast...

YOUNG EVE
What are you going to do, John?

(Pause.)

I don't even know why I bother asking anymore. I should put two and two together. You don't even listen to the hockey game anymore. You sit in front of that news broadcast with your eyes as big as saucers. I don't even want to guess what's going on in your head.

YOUNG JOHN
You might as well.

YOUNG EVE
John, you're not going! I won't let you. You don't have to...

YOUNG JOHN
Too late. I already joined up. I joined the air force.

YOUNG EVE
You're just running away!

YOUNG JOHN
Yes, Eve. I am. I'm running away...and flying away.

YOUNG EVE
But what about all our plans? We can do it, John. I know we can...

YOUNG JOHN
We can't...we shouldn't...why don't you take George and run away to the city with him?

YOUNG EVE
I don't want to run anywhere with George...

(She stops short.)

Why didn't you tell me?

YOUNG JOHN
Because I was afraid you'd talk me out of it...

YOUNG EVE (angry)
And what makes you God's gift to the war effort?

YOUNG JOHN
I'd like to know what I'm doing here that's so all-fired important. I really would. Clerk in a dry goods store? Watching Dad work so I can take over his job someday? Watching the trains come in and watching the trains go out. While I sit in a desk and watch. I might be crazy but I'd rather go overseas.

YOUNG EVE
It's not a paid holiday, John! It's...

YOUNG JOHN
It'll be over and done with in 3 months. That's what you keep saying! Maybe you're right.

(Pause. YOUNG EVE realizes she is beaten.)

YOUNG EVE
And what will I do...what will we do while you're gone? What will I do?

YOUNG JOHN
You can write me letters...you can sing...you can read your story in peace...and you can wait for me to come back...

(Pause.)

YOUNG EVE
Can I have your birthday wish? The one you didn't use?

(YOUNG JOHN nods. The two move close to each other as YOUNG JOHN lights the candle. Lights fade on memory scene.)

(JOHN stands listening and watching the memory scene.)

JOHN (yelling)
Boxer! Boxer!

(He stops, shakes his head. He looks at the house, takes a few steps in the direction of the house.)

You haven't beat me yet, you know. If I can't sell you I might burn you to the ground. Or turn you into a wax museum. Radio and all...

(JOHN starts toward the house as BOXER enters.)

BOXER
Hi, John. Does Pederson always screen your visitors or is it just my boyish charm?

JOHN (disoriented)
Mrs. Pederson?

BOXER
Your neighbour. She was hanging over the fence giving me her theory on cold fronts when you yelled. Nothing's the matter, is it? You sounded like you were calling me back from the dead.

JOHN
Maybe I was, afterall.

BOXER
How are you doing anyway?

JOHN
Born again, Boxer. Born again.

BOXER
Yeah, that'll be the day. When hell freezes over.

JOHN
Pretty skeptical for a guy your age, aren't you? What'll you have?

BOXER
Ahhh...nothing.

JOHN
What's the matter with you? I thought you were part of the me generation.

BOXER
I'll have a club sandwich. And a beer.

JOHN
Figures. Will a pop do you?

(BOXER nods. JOHN opens a pop for him.)

JOHN
First one's on the house. Pull up a chair and let's talk about art school.

BOXER
You got any ice?

JOHN
Not till hell freezes over. Just slosh it around in your mouth and it'll cool off. Now...

BOXER
You got anything to mix with this?

JOHN
Pour it on your head and catch the drippings after they've slid down your nose. Now when's this deadline?

(BOXER raises the can over his head, threatening to follow JOHN's suggestion. JOHN leans over and spills a little pop on BOXER's lap. BOXER throws more than a little pop back at JOHN, spilling some on himself in the process.)

JOHN (laughing)
Smartass kid!

(JOHN grabs BOXER by the arm and slowly pours the pop over his head.)

BOXER (laughing and choking)
Just remember I don't have any respect for my elders...

JOHN (still holding BOXER)
Then...don't forget...you're a runt!

(BOXER manages to pull JOHN down to the ground. JOHN is breathing a little hard and BOXER is laughing too hard, so both collapse into a heap.)

Now there's serious discussion off to a fine start...

(BOXER leaps up, jumps on the pop can, squashing it.)

BOXER
There's what I think of deadlines and...cold fronts!

(Both collapse with laughter again. The laughter slowly subsides. JOHN slowly pulls himself to his feet. BOXER brushes off his clothes.)

JOHN
You want another pop, you wasteful mutt?

(BOXER smiles and nods. JOHN opens two more pop.)

BOXER
Thanks. Hey, maybe Pederson knows where I can get some ice...

JOHN
Hmmmm...maybe she knows about art school too.

(Pause.)

BOXER
I guess Mom put a bug in your ear...

JOHN
I guess I already had one.

BOXER
Well, I don't know.

JOHN
Maybe you should get one of those career matchbooks and send away for a trade. You could be an interior designer or a fridge repairman.

BOXER
Maybe I should.

JOHN
Not in much of a fighting mood are you?

BOXER
Nothing to fight about, I guess.

JOHN
Did you want to take a crack at this art school thing or not?

BOXER
Yeah, I do. I do sometime.

JOHN
And what's wrong with right now?

BOXER
Maybe now's not the right time. It's a pretty big commitment to make, don't you think?

JOHN
That's how these things are generally done. There's no need to worry about "commitment" yet.

BOXER
What do you mean?

JOHN
You haven't been accepted yet. Which brings us back to where we started. When's the deadline?

BOXER
I'm supposed to talk to the guy next week and take him my stuff...

JOHN
Your "stuff"?

BOXER
My drawings and...stuff.

JOHN
What -- some chicken salad sandwiches or model cars...a marble collection...

BOXER
My portfolio! What are you...

JOHN
Just wanted to hear you say it, that's all. You were sounding like you might clean out your room and give him a box of your old toys or something.

BOXER (defensive)
I've got those landscapes and all my sketches and some photography and...

JOHN
I know what you've got. I've seen it.

BOXER
Well then, what are you on to me about?

JOHN
Just putting a burr under your ass, I guess. You gotta go in there thinking you're good.

BOXER
Well I am!

JOHN
Good. So what's the trouble?

BOXER
I'm scared shitless. Not about my...portfolio. About...leaving... things here.

JOHN
About being from a small town and having a piece of straw fall out of your back pocket?

BOXER
Oh come on. I've been to the college...

JOHN
But this is different isn't it?

BOXER
Maybe it is.

(JOHN turns to his work considers a piece of wood, searches for a tool.)

JOHN
Just think of the write-up you'd get.

BOXER
What?

JOHN
Write-up. In the paper.

(BOXER is still puzzled. JOHN continues working.)

Dressed in floor-length denim and carrying a bouquet of squashed popcans...the local boy made good.

BOXER (laughing)
Oh, they'd want a picture too. With a beret on! A last look at the kid before he gets corrupted...

JOHN
Before he starts making etchings...

BOXER
And gets lost in the...in the seedy underworld of the city!

JOHN
We'll have to get you a job dusting hymnbooks instead...right here in town!

BOXER
Hell no! I want my write-up!

(JOHN turns sharply away from his work.)

JOHN (serious now)
Then you'll go.

BOXER
I guess so. What are you going to do now?

JOHN
Oh, I've got a pretty full calendar. What with all the excitement over Hallowe'en.

BOXER (blurts it out)
Mom's worried about you.

JOHN
Because I won't go trick or treating tonight?

BOXER
She said you had some kind of crazy notion.

JOHN
Boy, she didn't tell you much, did she? I've had a lot of crazy notions. Is that all she told you?

BOXER
I had lunch with her. She was...pretty upset.

JOHN
About the flying?

BOXER
What!?

JOHN
You heard me.

BOXER
I heard you but I don't get it. What about flying?

JOHN
I'm going to take it up again. Take it up and take off...

BOXER
But you haven't flown a plane since the war...

JOHN
So it's about time...

BOXER
But do you still know how?

JOHN
I'll pick it up again pretty fast.

BOXER

When are you going to do it?

JOHN

Pretty soon.

BOXER

Why didn't you...

JOHN

Do it before?

BOXER

Well, yeah...

JOHN

You stay away from card games in the city there -- I can read you like a book. Next question.

BOXER

Why are you doin' it now?

JOHN

I thought I'd develop some hobbies...to get me through my twilight years...

BOXER

Is it anything to do with Aunt Joyce? I mean, her leaving and everything?

JOHN

Now, Boxer...

BOXER

I just meant, maybe she didn't want you to fly...

JOHN (chuckling)

Or now that John's wife has left him, he's picked up all sorts of "crazy notions".

(Pause.)

BOXER

I don't think it's crazy. I don't think it's crazy at all.

JOHN

Then what do you think?

BOXER

I think...I think it's great. But I still want to know what made you decide to do it now.

JOHN

I don't know if I can even tell you all the answers. If you can tell me why I stayed with Joyce as long as I did then maybe I could tell you why I'm taking up flying now. Maybe if you could listen to the walls of that house...(abrupt change of mood) you'd hear a tap dripping or some mice or some damn thing.

(Slight pause.)

You want all that pop?

BOXER

Guess not.

JOHN

Mind if I have a swig?

BOXER

Course not.

JOHN

Or maybe it's like your art school. Quite a commitment to make.

BOXER

Can I come with you? I'd like to come with you.

JOHN

Only if I can come to art school with you...

BOXER

I mean it. Can I come with you?

JOHN

You want to come?

BOXER

Yes.

JOHN

I don't even know when I'm going.

BOXER

I don't care. I want to come.

JOHN

If you're around, maybe...

BOXER

I'll be here.

JOHN
Now, Boxer. You've got interviews to go to, "stuff" to take, a mother to make happy.

BOXER
I'd like to come...when you go to the airport and things like that. I'd like to...

JOHN
I don't know why, but I'd like it too.

EVE (offstage)
John! You out here?

BOXER
I guess we won't go right now, hey?

JOHN (chuckling)
I guess not.

(EVE enters. She is carrying a pot and a couple of bowls.)

EVE (to BOXER)
There you are! I thought you might be here.

JOHN
You come all the way over here to feed Boxer?

EVE
No, I came here to feed you. I've got pot roast and beet pickles and potato salad...

JOHN
Alright. I surrender.

BOXER
Guess I better go.

JOHN
Boxer, you're not going to leave me on my own with the pot roast, are you?

BOXER
Sorry, John old boy. You'll have to face this one on your own.

JOHN
But Boxer...it's the pot roast! And the salad. Heavy artillery.

EVE
Alright you two. Enough. Now what have you been up to?

JOHN
Are we supposed to say "no good"?

EVE
Has Boxer been helping you?

BOXER
That's it. I was helping John.

EVE
Did you get anything settled?

JOHN
Let me see...I guess we decided the U.N. should organize a turkey raffle to see who gets Idi Amin.

EVE
I mean about art school.

BOXER
John's gonna go in my place.

EVE (angrily)
Stop it! Stop it, both of you.

(Uncomfortable pause.)

JOHN
Now Eve, don't get excited.

EVE
Why not? If you're going to be the local authority on everything I'd like to know what kind of propaganda you're putting out.

BOXER
It's okay, Mom. We talked it out. We...

EVE
So you're going?

BOXER
Why didn't you tell me John was going to fly?

EVE
I knew he'd tell you. Why don't you go with him to the interview, John?

BOXER
That'd be great. Can you come?

JOHN
I don't think so...I don't know just yet. When was it again?

BOXER
Next week. Day before your birthday. You could say you're the local authority. If Mom says you're the local authority, then...

JOHN
Now just hold it. I never said I'd go. I've got things to do.

BOXER
You need some help out here?

JOHN (sharply)
No. Thanks, Boxer.

BOXER (hurt)
But no thanks. Yeah...I guess I'll see you later.

EVE
You going out tonight?

(BOXER starts to exit.)

BOXER
Don't know.

EVE
Of course you know. Don't get into any trouble.

BOXER
Who are you talking to? You're the one that's going to the wild party.

(BOXER exits.)

EVE (calling after him)
When will you be in? Boxer!

(JOHN sits down with a piece of wood and begins sanding. EVE watches him for a moment and puts down her pots.)

EVE (uncertainly)
It's coming along.

JOHN
Boy, you've really come in waving a white flag, haven't you? Pot roast and then a critical opinion.

EVE
You've been spending a lot of time out here.

(Pause.)

I guess you're not making a coffee table or a bookshelf, are you?

JOHN
Why'd you plant that idea in his head? About me going to the interview.

EVE
Why did you tell him about your flying? Is this really all that important that you can't leave it?

JOHN
Yes, it damn well is. I can't explain.

EVE (softly)
Can you explain about Nora?

JOHN
Are we going to eat that stuff or do you want me to weave it into the wood here?

EVE
John...

JOHN
You remember those stories you used to read...curled up in the window seat? In Chatelaine or Good Dream-making or whatever the hell it was. One keeps sticking in my head. The one you used to read out loud. Do you remember what the name of it was?

EVE (evasively)
Why?

JOHN
The character in the story was Nora. So there you go.

EVE (after a pause)
How do you remember these things? Why do you remember?

(EVE takes paper plates out and puts food on the plates.)

JOHN
I don't know, Eve. I wish I didn't. I guess I'm just picking up where I left off. Something went wrong when I was about 19. And I'm just picking up where I left off.

EVE
You can't do that, John.

JOHN
I don't even remember what I've been doing for the last 30 years...

EVE
You can't do it, John.

JOHN
So I'm going to refresh my memory. Simple, really. Simple case of "where did I go wrong"...

EVE
And that's why you want to fly again?

JOHN
I guess that's why I keep remembering things, remembering times. My brain's sent out a tracer for some kind of turning point...

EVE
That's ridiculous, John. And even if it were true, why did it just occur to you now? You could have done this 20 years ago.

JOHN
Couldn't. Had other responsibilities.

EVE
Couldn't do it because you were scared, that's why. Scared the same thing would happen as the time you took George up.

JOHN (ignoring her)
And now's the perfect time, it seems. Soon as I sell the house, finish up around here.

EVE
I know about it, you know. I know all about it. George told me.

JOHN
That his Hallowe'en costume sitting in the bag there? I admire a man who lives on through his wardrobe.

EVE
He said you took him up in the airplane and then you got scared. You were going to do some tricks and then you got scared.

JOHN
Just wanted to see if he'd throw up on his tweed jacket. I think he would have rather bailed out than muss his jacket.

EVE

You were scared, John!

JOHN

That was twenty years ago!

EVE

Yes, John. It's in the past. It's history. Flying is something from the past.

JOHN

So is George. And Joyce. And being scared.

EVE

You never liked him.

JOHN

Ha! No speaking ill of the dead.

EVE

It's been two years. You can if you want.

JOHN

Guess it was mutual, eh? And you never cared for Joyce.

EVE

She was jealous of me, because of Boxer.

JOHN

Well maybe I was too.

(Long pause.)

EVE

Did you talk to Boxer?

JOHN

We had a can of pop.

EVE

Is he going to go? To this interview?

JOHN

I figure so.

EVE

He's talented, isn't he?

JOHN

Yes, Eve. He is.

EVE

Did you tell him so?

JOHN

Did you?

EVE

It wouldn't make much difference what I said, John. He...doesn't think I know anything about things like that.

JOHN

And what happens when he finds I'm old and wizened instead of old and wise?

EVE

I guess you'll have to deal with that when it comes.

(JOHN turns sharply and looks at EVE. She remains impassive.)

JOHN

I've been having...dreams.

EVE

Haven't we all?

JOHN

They're not dreams. They're memories. Only maybe they're not right. Because I never call them up on my own. I don't sit back in my armchair and "ruminate" about days gone by. They just swoop into my head like flame-tipped arrows. They're like old pictures... old photos with a gilt edging. And they're always dragging me back before the war...

EVE

Is that how things are for you now, John? Before war and after war. The two eras. I never thought you'd get like that. You sound like one of the old vets down at the Legion.

JOHN

Only it's never me, Eve. In the memories. It's always Boxer. I see Boxer in my dreams.

EVE (uneasily)

Now why would you do that?

JOHN

Me...Boxer...someone in between. Me and you. Me wanting to fly.

EVE
You never wanted to fly. That's not what you wanted. Don't you see? That's something that happened...because of the war.

JOHN
Before war and after war, hey?

EVE
And what does Boxer have to do with it?

JOHN
I don't know. Only he's there. Fighting with you about flying, and teasing you about your dream girl Nora.

EVE
Don't you get Boxer mixed up in this, John. Don't you think of Boxer like that. This is another time...

JOHN
Don't you think about those times?

EVE
As little as possible. You going to eat that?

JOHN
Pot roast soothes the fevered brow, eh?

EVE
Have you tried on the costume? It's not the pirate outfit but it'll do. Sort of a military thing. A red jacket and...do you have some light pants you could wear with it?

JOHN
Is there a fur hat in the bag?

EVE
No...

JOHN
Too bad. If there had been a fur hat with it I might have jumped at the chance. Oh well. There's always next year.

EVE
I'll pick you up about 8.

JOHN
It's a damn shame I'm so busy here in Santa's workshop or I'd be happy to go.

EVE
John, please.

JOHN
What is this?...some kind of mental health scheme? Get John out of the house?

EVE
Out of the backyard. And yes...maybe it is. You haven't been out anywhere for weeks.

JOHN
I don't have to go out. I have visiting hours in my backyard.

EVE
Maybe if you get out of the house you'll stop thinking about these things for a while. Sometimes it's like you're in a fantasy world. Flying and Nora...

JOHN
But I am going to fly and I did write the letter.

EVE
This letter...

JOHN
A letter to Nora. I spent a memorial day with Eve in the heart of Paris. With a girl who looked just like you. Or sounded just like you...or something. It was just after the Liberation. And just before I came home. We didn't talk much as you can imagine. Except for words like cigarette and...uh...apartment.

EVE
I'm not sure I want to hear about this...

JOHN
The key word was cigarette. It was the basis of our relationship. I couldn't pronounce her real name. So I called her Nora. She was a singer. Like the girl in the story.

(Chuckles.)

Like the sister at home. Spent her days mopping tables in a cafe and her nights singing in old run-down clubs. I stood under the Eiffel Tower for an hour and a half listening to her repeat my name. That's where she left me too. Shouting at each other over the crowd. She was a lot like you, somehow...

EVE
And you sent her a letter.

JOHN
Yep. First letter I've written in years. The last one was to say I'd be coming home. The last letter after the liberation of Paris.

EVE
That's a very long time to wait for a letter. That's a long time to wait.

(Lights fade up on YOUNG EVE. JOHN returns to his work. EVE's memory.)

YOUNG EVE
"Come on in, come on in"...oh God don't come in...please go away... "Heat's terrible, isn't it? ...Will you have a cold drink?"..Is my mother home?...no, no she's not...Father? No...no, just me. Only me...Come home mother...come home John.

(YOUNG EVE freezes.)

JOHN
She said she was going to be famous. She said she was going to sing in all the best nightclubs. Another Edith Piaf. Her eyes sparkled so bright when she talked about it that you could almost see the neon lights flashing.

(Pause.)

And I told her I was going to fly around the world. I told her that I would likely have occasion to stop in Paris. I thought I could do anything. I was pretty damned pleased with myself. Pleased not to be missing. Pleased to be alive.

(JOHN smiles at the memory as lights brighten on YOUNG EVE again.)

YOUNG EVE
I beg your pardon...missing...South of France? "Yes, I'm sorry, too, very sorry." Yes, I'll tell them. What in God's name am I supposed to tell them...

(YOUNG EVE freezes. EVE paces to dispell the memory.)

JOHN
So now maybe I'll fly to Paris. I'll fly anywhere. A rendezvous in the middle of the Atlantic.

EVE
Why did you write to her, John?

JOHN
I want to find out if she's famous. If she's Nora afterall. Maybe she only books one singing engagement a year now. And then retires to her country home.

EVE
She might have never had a chance to do any of those things. Maybe she won't even answer.

JOHN
Maybe she won't. I might go to the middle of the Atlantic anyway.

(Lights fade up on YOUNG EVE.)

YOUNG EVE
All we do is wait. Wait for news. Good news...bad news. Wait for news...wait for you...it might be a long time...a long time to wait. Some things can't wait...

(Lights fade completely on YOUNG EVE.)

EVE
What do you think I did? What do you think my memories are?

JOHN
I don't know.

EVE
What do you think I did between the letters?

JOHN
You were in love...

EVE
Not that much. Not that much in love. Not enough anyway. When George stepped off that train I knew that I had been waiting for you to come home. Not George. He was just another face pressed against the window on another train. That's what I remember, John. That's what I remember.

(Pause.)

I must turn up in their dreams.

JOHN
Whose dreams?

EVE
The soldiers. Soldiers' wives, soldiers' children. The hundreds and thousands that made their way across the country. I'm sure I saw the same faces once, twice, thirty times. I went to the station twice a week, every week. For six years. For some reason I thought that if I met every train...that one of those soldiers...one of those faces would light up, drop their bags and run into my arms.

(Pause.)

EVE
All those faces...pressed against the glass. The tired mothers and scared kids and wrinkled uniforms. Soldiers. Picking the straw out of their kit bags as they adjusted their berets. They'd never seen anything before except their own back forty. And me. I must turn up in their dreams. With a thermos of coffee and a sandwich and always...always...waving goodbye.

JOHN
And waiting for me.

EVE
Waiting for you...and waiting for myself. And I'm not going to do it again, John. I'm not going to wait to hear that an old dreamy man piled his plane into a thicket of trees. And I'm not going to wait for Boxer to find out he's 40 years old and nothing to show for it. You had your chance, John, and so did I. And now you hold Boxer's chance in the palm of your hand...

JOHN
I see him in my head, Eve. Only it's me.

EVE
Isn't it enough that I have to stand by and watch you wallow in days gone by? Why should you be allowed to do it when I have to forget all those times?

JOHN
You chose what you wanted...

EVE (fiercely)
No, I didn't. I almost did, John. I might have done a lot of things too, John. I might have married someone else. I might have left town. I wanted to leave. I was going to leave. I was going to let someone else take care of the "war effort". I was going to be something...a waitress...a secretary...a singer...or an acrobat.

JOHN
Well why didn't you...

EVE
Did I ever tell you about the liberation in our little town? When you were in Paris. Maybe it was the same night. I was sleeping and dreaming about leaving. And waiting in my sleep.

Hot summer night and the windows were open. And the first light of day just starting to streak the curtains. Something woke me. 4 in the morning and there was noise in a little town that always slept during the day and stopped breathing after midnight. A noise. It was a horn honking.

EVE (cont'd.)
I almost went back to sleep but my dream was already gone for good... so I got up. Who in the world could it be? Out driving drunk at 4 in the morning. The horn was louder by that time and whoever it was was heading up our street. I went out on the porch...half expecting to see old Charlie drive into a fence.
It was Roy Samson. The telegraph operator. Careening down the street in his old Buick. All the windows open, driving with one hand and laying on the horn for all he was worth. And yelling... hollering...bellering...at the top of his voice...JOHN MORGAN'S ALIVE! JOHN MORGAN'S ALIVE...ALIVE...
House lights snapping on like Christmas bulbs by that time. People opening their doors, stumbling on to their steps. I ran out into the street in my nightgown and they all ran out to meet me. We danced around in the dust like ghosts in our nightshirts. John Morgan's alive...

(Pause.)

You were coming home and I couldn't leave. Couldn't leave then... you were alive...

JOHN
Yes I was, Eve. I was goddamn well alive.

(Lights fade to black.)

End of Act One.

ACT TWO

It is almost midday. The work area in the back yard is even more cluttered than before. There is more wood, more pop cans, old jackets and even some old magazines. At the same time, much progress can be seen. There are several pieces of wood set aside that are completely finished. JOHN and BOXER are just offstage. They are moving the radio into the backyard.

JOHN

Easy...easy...

BOXER

You got it?

JOHN (singing between breaths)

Ada...Riley...was that sort of...girl...

BOXER

That a real song?...

JOHN

Sure...oops. Sorry.

BOXER

Oh come on...get the corner, the corner!

JOHN

You ready?

BOXER

Turn it the other way and I'll sing Happy Birthday to you.

JOHN

I thought I was giving the orders...Christ!

(Loud thump.)

BOXER

You gonna lift it or you wanna drop it on my other foot?

JOHN

No...go ahead. Go.

(BOXER and JOHN stagger in carrying the old radio. JOHN is wearing dress pants, dress shoes, a Legion blazer and an old baseball cap. JOHN puts down his end of the radio and surveys the backyard.)

BOXER

Where do you want it?

JOHN

Where I can keep an eye on it.

BOXER (exasperated)

Where do you want it?!

JOHN

Over here.

(They drag the radio close to JOHN's work area.)

That oughta do it.

BOXER

Whatever you say.

JOHN

Can I offer you a Schwepps for your trouble?

BOXER

Okay. Don't you ever drink juice or anything like that?

JOHN

Carbonated drinks stimulate the creative process. Orange juice is for chartered accountants.

BOXER

Does ice bugger up your process too?

(JOHN licks a finger and holds it up to the wind.)

JOHN

Not today.

(BOXER rummages through the provisions and gets some ice. JOHN opens some pop for himself. They drink in silence.)

BOXER (lifting his can in a toast)
Happy Birthday.

JOHN (lifting his can)
How was the big city?

BOXER
You sure you want to hear about it now, or do you wanna move some more furniture first?

JOHN
If you want to do the dusting while you talk, that's fine with me.

BOXER
Yeah, I bet. You gonna crank that radio up?

JOHN
No.

BOXER
Why'd you bring it out here then? To set pop cans on?

JOHN
Every day and in every way...you get to be more of a smartass.

BOXER
Well, why did we move it out here?

JOHN
I told you. I want to keep an eye on it.

(Pause.)

You know the expression "they're playing our song"? Well I'd rather they didn't.

BOXER
I don't get it.

JOHN (exasperated)
A lot of things happened around that radio. It's just about the only thing that Joyce didn't redecorate. It's from the "old days".

(Pause.)

I figured if I could get it out of the...haunted house there...I'd stop having dreams and...

BOXER
Oh.

JOHN
Now aren't you sorry you asked?

BOXER
I don't know yet. Keep going.

JOHN
No, you keep going. I don't think we even got as far as your trip on the Greyhound bus. How was it?

BOXER
Oh, delightful.

JOHN
Ahh, yes. Smell of Saniflush filling up your nostrils...a rest stop every 10 minutes at the next town.

BOXER
You got it.

JOHN
Then what? When did you get there?

BOXER
Just before lunch.

JOHN
And there was someone from the art school waiting with a sedan chair, right?

BOXER
No. Then I had lunch. Toasted bacon and tomato sandwich. Coffee.

JOHN
Christ, that's interesting, Boxer. Then what did you do?

BOXER
Then I got on another bus. I went to the art gallery.

JOHN
Hmmmm. What time was the interview?

BOXER
2 o'clock. So I wandered around the art gallery for a while. Then I got on another bus and went to the interview. Then I got on another bus and came home.

JOHN
You didn't stay at Harold's overnight?

BOXER
Yeah, I forgot. Did that too.

JOHN
Weren't you supposed to pick up some things for Eve?

BOXER
Did that after the art gallery, before the interview.

JOHN
And how was it?

BOXER
It was all there. Got everything she wanted.

(Pause.)

The interview was a snap. It was great.

(Pause. JOHN looks at BOXER. BOXER avoids his gaze.)

JOHN
Glad to hear it.

(JOHN turns to his work. BOXER wanders around the work area. He looks at the pile of magazines, flips through a few, finds a Plain Truth magazine.)

BOXER
What's this? Plain Truth? You finally giving up the ghost and converting?

JOHN
I'm writing a rebuttal entitled "It's a damn lie".

BOXER
That's a relief. That'd be something else crazy if you were...

(JOHN turns sharply to look at BOXER. BOXER stops, embarrassed.)

JOHN
The way I've got it figured...God's sitting on the edge of the ozone layer in a windbreaker laughing at us. I thought I'd fly up there and ask how he feels about all these aerosol spray outfits.

(Pause.)

JOHN

That crazy enough for you?

BOXER

Sure. Sure it is.

(JOHN turns to his work again. BOXER continues looking through magazines.)

Hey, there's some really old magazines here. A...Chatelaine from 1940. Another Chatelaine from...Why have you got these out here?

JOHN

Same reason I brought the radio out, I guess.

BOXER

I don't know if I ever got that straight.

JOHN

And I don't know if I ever got the whole story on your trip yet. It kind of whizzed past me. You don't mind filling in some of the details, do you? How many refills did you have on the cup of coffee? How were the pictures hanging? Any good-looking girls at the school?

BOXER

Five refills and fourteen good-looking girls.

JOHN

Is that right, Boxer?

BOXER

I went to the art gallery, I got on the bus and I rode all over the city. I got lost. I was late. When I got there he wasn't there.

JOHN

Horseshit!

BOXER

I was so late I decided not to go. Better not to go at all than to walk in an hour late.

JOHN

No wonder it was such a snap. You never even set foot in the damn building.

BOXER

I was late!

JOHN

You're lying.

BOXER

If you say so.

(Pause.)

JOHN

Do you want to tell me about it?

BOXER

I imagine I will eventually.

JOHN

Alright.

(JOHN turns to his work. He chooses one of the finished pieces and begins clearing a space for it. He examines the wood, long and hard, and then sets it down. He begins clearing an area in the middle of his work space.)

BOXER

Are you still selling the house?

JOHN

It's in the listings.

BOXER

Anyone come to look at it yet?

JOHN

No. I imagine it's too full of whispers and weeping for anyone else to want to take it on.

BOXER

Even with the radio out?

JOHN

Even with the radio out. That kind of thing leaks through the floor boards.

BOXER

When do you think you'll be finished out here?

JOHN

I don't really know. Pretty soon.

JOHN (cont'd.)
I don't really know whether I'm building a picket fence or a monument.

BOXER
I think it's a monument.

JOHN (turning from his work)
Do you, Boxer? What do you think I'm doing back here?

BOXER
I thought you were just...puttering...when you first started.

JOHN
I wonder if Eve still thinks I'm making her a coffee table for Christmas...

BOXER
I don't think so. I might have thought that too...for a while. You're always making something. You've always been like that. When you hauled all this wood back here I didn't think anything of it. Remember when you made the feed bag for Harold?

(JOHN chuckles.)

Did you ever give that to him?

(JOHN shakes his head.)

And the pyramid. I remember when you were out here every weekend for about a month making that thing.

(Pause.)

But this is different. I watch you sometimes and you get this look on your face...this look like you're carving the history of the world on to some kind of tablet. What are you doing out here, John?

JOHN (offhand)
I've covered B.C. and I'm halfway through A.D. I kind of got stuck around the Rise of the Third Reich.

BOXER
I mean it, John.

JOHN
And I mean I'd tell you if I knew.

BOXER
You gotta know. You must...

JOHN
And you must know why you didn't go yesterday. Do you?

BOXER
I meant to go. I thought I was going yesterday morning. When I was sitting on the bus, the Greyhound, I was figuring out what I was going to say. After I had that sandwich I was even more sure.

(Pause.)

I started to get a bit crazy when I was in the art gallery. Scared, crazy...I don't know. I just wanted to turn around and come right home. Maybe it was from staring at paintings by people who are a million years ahead of me. Maybe I just changed my mind. Maybe it was something in the sandwich. But I got on the bus and I figured I'd just get someone to push me out of the door when I got to my stop.

(Pause.)

No one pushed me out of the bus so I didn't get off. I missed my stop and went all the way around the route again.

(Pause.)

And that's it. That's the whole story.

JOHN
Have you told your mother?

BOXER
No. I told her...

JOHN
You told her the same things you told me. A snap.

BOXER
Well she's not going to be very pleased with you either.

JOHN
Why not?

BOXER
Aren't you supposed to be at the Remembrance Day services? That's where Mom is.

JOHN
I'm busy.

BOXER
Kind of looks like you figured on going.

JOHN
Nope. All my other blue blazers and dress pants were in the wash.

BOXER
All your other berets, too?

(BOXER picks up JOHN's Legion beret which is lying in a pile of pop cans. JOHN takes the beret from BOXER and gently brushes it off.)

JOHN
I couldn't go.

BOXER
Neither could I...

JOHN
This is a little different, Boxer. Once, a very long time ago, I felt like this. It was a Sunday and your grandmother was dead set on me going to church. It was a special service for those of us who had come home from the war. Complete with a picnic and three-legged races. And one-legged races. I knew I couldn't go. I knew there was a reason not to go. I finally gave in, though. I went and had benedictions and cold chicken. I spent the whole afternoon with this queasy feeling in my stomach, a sharp pain at the back of my brain. I just knew. While I was gone my best friend from the flight squadron came to visit. He waited around for as long as he could but he had to leave a note. He...got killed in a farming accident six months later. Five years of shooting spitballs into a blast furnace and he gets killed checking a fanbelt on a combine.

(Pause.)

BOXER
And that's how you feel today?

JOHN
Yes. This...has happened before. Sometimes it means I'm going to run out of gas around the next bend. Sometimes it's a little more. It's like having a dream while you're still awake. Or running over a memory...that hasn't happened yet.

BOXER
Memories?

JOHN
Not sunsets and family reunions and photo albums. It's like veins in the wall of a cave.

BOXER
What's going to happen?

JOHN (evasively)
I don't know. Your mother will probably give me hell about missing the service. Then she'll give you hell about missing the interview. And then we'll all have birthday cake.

(JOHN turns to work on his sculpture. His pace is more frenetic than it has ever been previously. He seems to be looking for something, as he handles different pieces of wood in turn. He rummages through his pile for some sanding paper and sets to work on a piece of wood.)

BOXER
She's going to do more than give me hell. She's going to...

JOHN
What are your plans now, Boxer?

BOXER
I don't know. I...was kind of thinking I might do a stint out at the gas plant. Eric and Joey work out there. It's 8 bucks an hour starting wages.

JOHN
How long Eric and Joey been there?

BOXER
Oh, about a year. They're saving up to go to Europe.

JOHN
Didn't Eric just pile his dad's truck into a wall or something?

BOXER
Yeah, yeah I guess he did.

JOHN
So I guess he'll be working there another year, won't he?

BOXER
Maybe, I don't know.

JOHN
Is that what you want to do?

BOXER
I don't know. It'll be okay for a while.

JOHN

And then what?

BOXER

I don't know. I guess I'll see when...

JOHN

You don't know much, do you?

BOXER

Is that a dare or a prophecy?

JOHN

Well, if you're not going to art school you might as well go the whole hog. Why don't you join the army?

BOXER

What do you want from me?

JOHN

What do you want from me?

BOXER

I want...I want to run away and I never want to leave here.

JOHN (after a pause)

Well, maybe you better run away...for now. That's not a dare or a prophecy.

BOXER (after a pause)

You want anything? Cigarettes or...something?

JOHN

Warm pop.

BOXER

I'll see if they got any of that.

(BOXER prepares to leave. JOHN suddenly throws down the tool he's been holding and turns to BOXER.)

JOHN

Boxer?

BOXER

Yeah?

JOHN

You feel like taking a turn out to the airport?

BOXER

To the airport?

JOHN

That's what I said. I'd appreciate some company.

BOXER

I must be getting up in the world. Never had an invitation to the airport before.

JOHN

Maybe that's because I never go.

BOXER

Really? Well, how in the hell...

JOHN

You never been out there?

BOXER

I went to a fly-in breakfast once. I did some models when I was little. But I've never even been up in a small plane.

JOHN

I'm surprised your mother hasn't dragged you out there. That woman's just crazy about airplanes.

BOXER

Are you kidding? I think she gets sick watching kites let alone... Oh, you are kidding.

(Pause.)

I guess I've always been sort of warned off the property about airplanes. I woke up one Christmas morning and there was a pile of hockey equipment under the tree. And that was that.

JOHN (carefully)

Did your dad ever say anything about flying?

BOXER

I don't know. Not that I remember.

JOHN

Well, just give me a minute, Boxer. Gotta change out of my work clothes.

BOXER

What are you going to wear...your suit?

(JOHN begins to move to house.)

JOHN

Smartass kid.

BOXER

Here's your beret.

(BOXER picks up JOHN's beret and a handful of mail.)

And your mail. Hey, there's an airmail letter here.

JOHN

I know.

BOXER

Aren't you going to open it?

JOHN

I will, Boxer. But I don't have to do it right now. Either way it's my flying papers.

BOXER

What?

JOHN

Never mind. Let's get going while the sky's still clear.

BOXER

Okay.

(BOXER exits toward the house and JOHN, after a long hard look at his sculpture, follows him. Lights fade up as airplane noise comes up. The volume increases to an almost deafening level and then changes slightly from engine noise to the sound a bomber makes when it takes a dive. The light comes up slowly on JOHN. He is in a memory area and seems completely disoriented. The sound of radio music, big band jazz fades quietly into the scene. YOUNG EVE moves into the space.

YOUNG EVE

You're home now. It's alright. You've got your whole life ahead of you.

JOHN (weary, mechanical)
Most of the time I felt like a pebble snapped out of a slingshot. Some rotten little kid with his sights trained on a gopher was loading us up, gritting his teeth and letting go. Up you go... you're doing fine...and then boom. In for a landing. Then do it all over again. Sometimes I wanted to take a big roll of black tape and wrap it around the belly of my Spitfire. Or patch it up with bubble gum...take a wrong turn and come home.

YOUNG EVE
What was London like? I'd like to go there sometime. I wish I'd been there with you.

JOHN
But most of the time I just wanted to sleep. You know...I think I flew that plane in my sleep sometimes. You just get to the good part of the dream and someone's shooting at you. And down you go. Drift off just nicely and someone drags you into the plane again. That's not an airplane; that's a tin cup.

YOUNG EVE
Do you want to drive around town? There'a a new drugstore now. And a lot of new houses over by Thompsens. You want to take a drive?

JOHN
I just want to sleep...

(Pause. YOUNG EVE's manner changes perceptibly. She has been coaxing and bright. Now her voice takes on a weariness, resignation.)

YOUNG EVE
I think I'm going to...marry George. He's got a job here in town.

JOHN
It's so damn quiet in this house. I don't even think the grass has grown since I left. Quiet as the grave all day long and then I go to sleep and I hear engine noises...propellors flapping like bird's wings.

YOUNG EVE
It's all over now. You're home now. It's all over.

(YOUNG EVE exits.)

JOHN
That was the best goddamn time I've ever had. I'm so goddamn glad I'm home. Oh Christ, Eve. I'm so goddamn tired. Eve...Eve...

(Lights fade on scene. EVE enters. She is dressed for the Remembrance Day service: white skirt, navy blazer, navy tam. EVE comes in mad and then stops when she sees JOHN.)

EVE

John? Are you alright?

JOHN (without turning around)

I'm so goddamn tired.

EVE

John...

JOHN

What?...Oh, hello.

EVE

How's the wandering woodcarver today?

JOHN

I'm not just sure.

EVE

Do you wear a watch anymore? Or maybe you're just on a different calendar than I am.

JOHN

Take it easy, Eve.

EVE

I swear I've spent half my life waiting for you. Do you even know what day it is?

JOHN

It's my birthday.

EVE

Is that why you're all dressed up?

JOHN

No, no it's not.

EVE

It's November 11th and it's...1:30 in the afternoon. Does that ring a bell? Does it mean anything to you besides the fact that you're another year older?

JOHN

Yes, Eve. It means something.

EVE
I know it used to, but I'm not so sure anymore.

JOHN
I know where I was supposed to be. I couldn't come.

EVE
You haven't missed a Remembrance Day service in 30 years. What was it that was so pressing that you couldn't come today? People don't even ask me about you anymore. No one said a word. They just looked understanding.

JOHN
Well bless them. I'm glad they understand.

(Pause.)

EVE
Well, whatever it is, it's sure taken the wind out of your sails. It's not like you to be so meek and mild.

JOHN
But then it's not like me to miss the service either.

EVE
While we're at it maybe you can tell me why the radio's out here.

JOHN
I moved it out this morning.

EVE
I see that.

JOHN
You want some pop?

EVE
No, I don't want pop.

JOHN
You sure? It's warm, just the way you like it.

EVE
Is that why you didn't come? Because you were moving the radio?

JOHN
I meant to go. I even dragged out the iron and pressed the moth-balls out of the old serge Legion pants.

EVE

I tried to phone you.

JOHN

I was all dressed by 10:30. I even took a jacknife to my round the clock shadow so no one would think I'd been on a binge.

EVE

Mrs. Pederson was at the service. She took it upon herself to tell me that you slept out here last night.

JOHN

I've been sleeping out here for a week.

EVE

John, it's almost winter. There'll be snow on the ground.

JOHN

It's almost winter and I'm almost finished.

EVE

Well, if I'd know things were this serious I might have arranged for them to bring the cenotaph over to your backyard.

JOHN

Eve, I didn't go to the service because I had a feeling something more important might happen if I stayed here.

EVE

And?

JOHN

I went to the airport.

(Pause.)

EVE

Well, I guess you're still alive. You said you were going to do this on your birthday and for once you were true to your word...

JOHN

I didn't go up in an airplane, if that's what you mean. I'm beginning to wonder about myself. Went all the way out to the airport and didn't fly. Got Boxer to drag the noisebox out here and I haven't turned it on yet...

EVE

He was out prowling before I even got up. I think that interview was quite a shock to his sytem.

JOHN
I think you're probably right about that.

EVE
Did he talk to you about it?

JOHN
He went to the airport with me.

EVE
Did he, now?

JOHN
Yes.

EVE
Do you know where he is now?

JOHN
That might be him just overhead there...

EVE
In an airplane?

JOHN
I hope so...

EVE
John, what are you up to?

JOHN
I'm not up to anything anymore.

EVE
Why did you take him out there? Why did you leave him out there?

JOHN
He'll find his way home. I couldn't stay.

EVE
This is quite a day, isn't it? You couldn't come to the service. You couldn't stay at the airport.

JOHN
I went out there because I thought I was going to get into an airplane and take off.

EVE
Well, thank God you didn't.

JOHN
And thank God I didn't take Boxer up? No, Eve. You must know me better than that. I wouldn't have done that. That's only a trick for doubting middle-aged business men. For self-satisfied George. I took Boxer out there because I wanted a witness. I took him out there because I needed him and he...needed to go out there.

EVE
So you didn't...I'm glad you changed your mind.

JOHN
I didn't really change my mind, Eve. I must have changed my mind a long time ago.

(Long pause.)

EVE
You mean you're not going to fly?

JOHN
No, Eve. I guess that's why I missed the service.

(Pause.)

All the way there...to the airport...I could hardly keep my eyes on the road I was so busy looking up the sky tracing my route. Looking forward to having the bottom drop out of my stomach on a fast climb. To get all the houses and the churches and the barns in their proper perspective. It's such a clear day, Eve. Such a perfect day...for anything.
I got there, got out of the car and all of a sudden I wanted to press my steps into the asphalt so that a breeze didn't catch me and whisk me away...Watching my step. Keeping close to the ground. I was already running for cover. Running from the noise, mostly. I don't know what Boxer thought. I don't know if he noticed. I sent him off to talk to Ernie. I walked myself over to a little plane that looked quiet. To touch it...like you would a car or a thoroughbred. It was a shock to touch the metal, Eve. Hot metal winking and flashing in the sun. Like it was daring me to touch it. It could smell the fear in my hands like a smart horse.
Jesus, Eve...I felt like a tourist. Taking pictures of the natives and they'd rather spit on you than smile. And the noise. Deafening. Engine noise. It sounded like screams. Great, flapping, screeching birds circling over the prey. I...I don't know how I ever did that, Eve. I don't know how I ever climbed into the belly and choked those suckers into the sky.

(Pause.)

JOHN (cont'd.)
All these years. All these years. Selling life insurance to people who thought they'd never die. Burning holes in my old grey suit and hightailing it in the Buick. All the time not caring if they lived for ever or if I sold a five cent policy. I was meant to be somewhere else. I was meant to do other things. I could sit on the porch and think about my real vocation. Provocation... evocation.

(Pause.)

I couldn't have got into a plane if I had wanted to. And I didn't. Didn't want to. That's what I had to find out. That's why I didn't come to the service. I don't know what I wanted to do all these years. But it wasn't flying.

EVE
Are you alright?

JOHN
It's been a damn good dream. Just because it doesn't work out in truth doesn't mean it can't be a damn fine notion. Every farmer plowing his field must look up and think..."By God but there's a cool breeze up there." A young clerk coming off her shift must get dizzy sometimes staring up wondering where the jets all go. Everybody gets tired of scuffing the polish off the earth.

(Pause.)

Going out there today was like...an end to all impossible things. I thought that's what all these old tattered visions were adding up to but it's not. It's something else. Something else.

(JOHN, very weary, goes and sits in his work area. He stares at his work.)

EVE
I've been so worried about Boxer.

JOHN
He waved at me that he was going up with Ernie. I couldn't even stand to watch him take off.

EVE
I've been so worried that he would get caught up with your flying. He admires you so much, too much sometimes. I was afraid he would get wound up in your flying business.

JOHN
I shouldn't have taken him out there, Eve.

EVE

It's alright.

JOHN

No, no it's not, Eve.

EVE

It's alright. He's set in what he's going to do.

JOHN

Eve...

(Pause.)

I shouldn't have taken him out there. There's going to be hell to pay.

EVE

Why?

(BOXER enters, running.)

BOXER

Hello! Hello!

(BOXER stops short when he sees EVE.)

Hi, mom.

EVE

Hello, Boxer. How was your plane ride?

BOXER

How did you know?

EVE

Well, I've got the instigator right here.

JOHN

She tortured me, Boxer. I had to tell her.

BOXER

Had to tell her what?

JOHN

Where you were.

BOXER

What the hell happened to you?

JOHN (offhand)
I got cold feet. Did you have fun?

BOXER
I guess you could call it that. I had to hitchhike back from the airport. Why did you leave?

JOHN
I had to come back and catch hell from my sister.

EVE
Ha! I hardly said boo and you know it.

JOHN
You never even wished me Happy Birthday.

BOXER
I offered to sing it to you.

EVE
You're right...I didn't.

(EVE goes to JOHN and kisses him on the cheek.)

And to add insult to injury I haven't even made your cake yet.

JOHN
I'll be wanting hats and party favours, too.

EVE
Yes, sir. Can I count on you being home later, Boxer?

BOXER
Yep.

EVE
I'll be going now...so all hell can break loose while I'm making your cake. See you later.

JOHN
Bye, Eve.

BOXER
Bye, Mom.

(BOXER begins pacing around the area.)

You didn't tell her.

JOHN
About the interview? I thought you'd better do that. Besides, I was already in the line of fire because I didn't go to the service.

BOXER
Oh, she's really going to love us now.

JOHN
Whoa! Speak for yourself, Boxer.

BOXER
I wish you hadn't left. I...

JOHN
You better sit down. You look like you're going to overbalance.

BOXER
Yeah, okay. I'm out at the airport, right?

JOHN
With your Uncle John.

BOXER
Right...no, now listen. I'm just telling you how it happened. Anyway. That Ernie's a hell of a guy.

JOHN
Got it.

BOXER
Do you want to hear this or not?

JOHN
I'm not sure I do...but go ahead.

BOXER
Okay. There we are. We're in the plane. We must have gone...hell we must have covered the whole county in about five minutes. He didn't say anything. I didn't say anything. No, wait. All he says is..."So you're John's nephew." I said I was. He nodded his head and that was it. Didn't say another word for...ages. Honestly. Just sat there chewing his lip and looking like he didn't want to be interrupted. He took a couple of real good dives, too. I thought we were going to take the top off of a couple of farmhouses. It was kind of like he was testing me to see if I puked or anything.

JOHN
And did you?

BOXER

No, thank God. That's the last time I ever have pop before I go up in a plane, though. Anyway. He takes a couple of real good dives, circles and then it looked like we were heading back. I was kind of disappointed. He was treating me like a visitor at a dude ranch.

(Pause.)

Then...we got to talking. He was asking what I do and what my plans are. And I was asking him questions. About flying. Did you know that that's one of the best commercial airports around? A lot of guys go there to do their training. He was telling me all about it. Like...what a commercial pilot has to do to train and...

JOHN

He has to throw up.

BOXER

We talked about you, too. He sounds like he really admires you for taking up flying again. He said he was too young to be in the war but he remembers it pretty well.

JOHN

Like hell he does.

BOXER

Anyway...he kind of made me an offer. He said they need some help out there, someone to do joe-jobs. If I wanted to do it, I could work my way into taking lessons.

(Pause.)

Well, what do you think?

JOHN

That's something, alright. Picasso one day and Billy Bishop the next.

BOXER

Ernie said the three of us can go flying. I'll take lessons, you can brush up and Ernie'll be there to baby us along until we can go by ourselves...the two of us. Eventually we'll be on our own. We can wave to each other.

JOHN

Sure. You up there and me down here. I'm building a monument, remember?

BOXER

What do you think?

JOHN
You haven't been listening to a word I'm saying.

BOXER
I'm excited, I guess.

JOHN
You don't sound excited to me, Boxer. You sound frantic.

BOXER
I'm just trying to tell you how it happened, that's all.

JOHN
So you're going to be a commercial pilot?

BOXER
Yeah, sure.

JOHN
Did the sky open up so you could shake hands with God? Or maybe you hit 3,000 feet and started to speak in tongues.

BOXER
What's the matter?

JOHN
I'm saying that a few encouraging words from an ice cream salesman would have had you peddling dairy products if they hit you up today. I'm saying that you're open for suggestions.

BOXER
What's the matter with you? You sound mad.

JOHN
Last week this time you were set on having your picture taken for the local newspaper. Local boy makes good. Now it's local boy takes off.

BOXER
Aren't you happy? Aren't you happy that I set everything up for us? Or maybe you weren't ready yet? Is that it?

JOHN
There's nothing to get ready for.

BOXER
You going to fly.

JOHN
I don't want to fly.

(Pause.)

BOXER

What?

JOHN

I don't want to fly.

BOXER

What are you talking about? That's all you've ever wanted. Of course you want to.

JOHN

How would you know what I've ever wanted if I don't know myself?

BOXER

You couldn't fly before because...you had responsibilities.

JOHN

Responsibilities to what? To who?

BOXER

Aunt Joyce and...

JOHN

Come on, Boxer. You can do better than that.

BOXER

You were born about 30 years too early. All the things you wanted to do...you couldn't do them then.

JOHN

Why not, Boxer?

BOXER

Things were different then!

JOHN

Or maybe I was always running away from failure? Or always running away from success. Which one sounds better? Or maybe I was just running away. Running away from decisions. Running away from your mother.

BOXER (almost crying with frustration)

You had to go to war!

JOHN

And it's a damn good thing, too. Or I don't know what would have happened.

BOXER

I don't know what you're talking about!

JOHN
And I don't want you to know either!

BOXER
What do you want me to do?!

JOHN
I want you to do what you want to do!

BOXER
I want to fly with you.

JOHN
I changed my mind, Boxer. I had a change in heart.

BOXER
How could you change your mind about something like that?

JOHN
I made a mistake. An error. A mistake.

BOXER
That's some mistake to make.

JOHN
It's some mistake, yes. And I don't want you to make the same one.

BOXER
Where the hell do you get off handing out advice? Warning me about mistakes. You're just scared.

JOHN

Alright, I'm scared.

BOXER
No you're not, dammit! Jesus -- this is like kicking in a damn sandcastle or something.

JOHN
Who built the sandcastle?

BOXER
Stop it! Stop throwing it back at me like you're some kind of wise man on the fucking mountain!

JOHN
I am not wise, Boxer, and I'm right here, bolted to the ground.

(Long pause.)

BOXER

I have always looked up to you. Since I was little. You always had the answers. Always...I knew you were never going to get rich being smart. I knew you were never going to have a chance to make people see things your way. But I thought I saw things your way. Even when all this other shit started to happen...I thought you knew what you were doing.

JOHN

And I don't.

BOXER

No. No you don't. Maybe you don't. You wanna know why I didn't go to that interview? You want to know? Because of you. Because I didn't want you to be alone. I didn't want you to be alone out here or up there or anywhere. I wanted to be with you.

(Pause.)

And you couldn't even spend the time to come with me and make sure I went. And I wonder why. Was it because you didn't want to see me bugger up? Or because you didn't want to see me succeed? Or because you couldn't leave the woodpile in the old back yard here?

JOHN

I'm sorry, Boxer...

BOXER

Don't be sorry, John. That's not like you. Don't admit you were wrong. Don't admit that you don't know. I don't think you do know. I don't think you know what you're doing back here. I don't think you...

JOHN

No, no I don't.

BOXER

You fuck-up! You eternal ever-lasting fuck-up!

(BOXER stops, horrified. Long pause. JOHN turns his back on BOXER, picks up a tool.)

JOHN

I think you should go ahead with this pilot idea, Boxer. It sounds like a fine idea if that's what you want. Or phone this guy at the art school and tell him you had car trouble. Tell him you'll come back and see him. You're first rate, Boxer. You'd make a first rate anything. Doctor, lawyer, trucker, acrobat, pilot. You can do anything in the world you want. I could have done anything.

JOHN (cont'd.)
Maybe almost anything you can. But I decided not to. I decided to think about it all my life instead. Sometimes thinking about it is almost as good as doing it.

(BOXER stares at JOHN's back for a while. His face slowly hardens.)

BOXER
Hell no. I think I'll take that job at the gas plant. Or as a store clerk. Or dusting hymnbooks. That way...that way I can have all that spare time to just think about art school.

(BOXER turns away from JOHN and exits. JOHN turns and watches him leave. Long pause. With great weariness and pain JOHN turns and surveys his work area.)

JOHN (softly)
Boxer...Boxer...

(JOHN picks up a piece of finished wood and takes it to the clearing. He kneels on the ground and secures it in place. JOHN steps back from the area and stares at the arrangement. He goes to the wood and touches it, lovingly. He picks up another piece of wood and takes it to the clearing. He begins to erect it and then stops. He draws back from the area and gently lays the wood aside. Lights fade up slowly on YOUNG EVE in memory area. She speaks as though conversing with YOUNG JOHN. JOHN watches.)

YOUNG EVE (laughing)
Don't you remember, John? Last night? You don't remember?

(Pause.)

It was long after midnight...maybe I imagined it. At least I thought I imagined it and then I found your sketchbook in my room. I guess you were sleep-walking...or dream-talking. I don't know. You came to my room and you knocked on the door. I almost didn't open it... I was dreaming about a long hallway with doors opening and people knocking and...I let you in and you handed me your sketchbook. I was half asleep myself and I didn't know what you wanted. You said "Look at it, look at it...tell me what it is." It was...a child's drawing...crude and simple. I laughed. You were...angry. You said...you'd drawn it in your sleep, you woke up with a pencil in

YOUNG EVE (cont'd.)
your hand. You didn't know why you'd started it and you didn't know what it was. Your fingers were outlining and shading all on their own. You said -- "I have to do it, you know." I said... "I know." I didn't know what else to say. I was so tired and your face was so white and strange in the moonlight. I said... "I'm tired." And you leaned over and you kissed me. You looked at me so funny like you'd just realized who I was. And then you said..."We might as well tie stones around our necks." And then you turned and walked out. I called after you but I didn't want to wake anyone. Maybe I didn't want to wake you. The strangest thing..."I have to do it, you know." And you pushed that picture at me. A child's drawing. A dream picture.

(Pause.)

Don't you remember, John?

(Lights fade on YOUNG EVE laughing lightly and leaving the memory area. JOHN stares at YOUNG EVE as she disappears. JOHN turns to his work. He picks up a piece of wood and then draws back from it, startled.)

JOHN
Sometimes...sometimes the damn wood is warm...when there's no sun out.

(Pause.)

No sandpaper been used on you for days.
Warm and breathing or warm and bleeding?
One of these days I'll wake up and there'll be a leaf dangling from around your neck.
This morning I turned over and throw that old blanket off.
I saw a flash of green against the bark.

(Pause.)

And then it wasn't there. Laid my hand on the wood and it was warm. Lukewarm.
Warm like someone had been holding you under their coat instead of leaving you out to feel the frost.

(Pause.)

Crazy. Crazy old son of a bitch.

(JOHN sits down and slowly takes the letter from his pocket and begins to read. He is interrupted by EVE.)

EVE

What did you do to Boxer?

JOHN

Hello, Eve.

EVE

I didn't come to pass the time of day, John. What did you say to him?

JOHN

He'll be alright.

EVE

I don't care how you think he'll be. He says he's not going to art school. He says he doesn't know what he wants. He looks like he's been kicked.

JOHN

I didn't tell him anything that wasn't true.

EVE

And that's supposed to be comforting?

JOHN

Sometimes you have to grow up so fast it kind of takes your breath away.

EVE

I don't want any quaint little drops of wisdom...

JOHN

For God's sake, Eve, What do you think I said to him? Do you think I told him to run away from home? Or that you're not his real mother or there's no God or no mayor...the Catholic Church is in ruins or Canadian winters are hard on tires...

EVE

Stop it! Boxer is not some kind of slave that comes to hear judgement fall from the master's lips. He's my son, John. He's all I've got.

JOHN

He's all I've got too.

EVE

Not anymore, John. Not for a long time.

(Pause.)

JOHN (slow, weary)
He came out to the airport with me. I left him out there. When he came back he was all enthused about flying. I had to tell him I wasn't going to fly. He was counting on me to go along with him. I didn't.

EVE
That's fine, John, but what does it have to do with going to art school?

JOHN
Eve...he...

(EVE notices the letter on the ground.)

EVE
What's that?

JOHN
It's from France.

EVE
What does it say?

JOHN
It's from her sister. That's as far as I got.

EVE
Read it.

JOHN
Not very good English. But it's clear enough. She married in 1946. Had two children. Kept books for her husband's business. And she...continued to sing for her own pleasure. Died in 1978.

EVE
I'm sorry she passed away.

JOHN
She didn't pass away. She's dead.

EVE
I know she is.

(Pause.)

Is that all it says?

JOHN
Yes.

EVE
Then she wasn't another Edith Piaf?

JOHN
No, no she wasn't.

EVE
I'm sorry.

JOHN
Maybe she didn't want to be.

EVE
I don't believe that.

JOHN
Then what happened?

EVE
Maybe she had to marry someone she didn't love because she was tired of waiting. Maybe there was no money and no time. Maybe there was someone she looked up to...to give their blessing to her dreams. And they didn't.

JOHN
I'm almost glad, do you know that? I'm almost relieved that I didn't get a note from her press agent or a heart-warming description of her fulfilling career as a music teacher.

EVE
Are you glad Boxer's not going to art school?

JOHN
Of course I'm not.

EVE
So long as you're surrounded by people who've never done what they want then that makes you feel better.

JOHN
It doesn't make me feel better. It confirms what I've always believed about what's possible and what's not.

(Pause.)

EVE
Boxer's going to art school, John. No matter what you believe.

JOHN
Eve...

EVE
Just because you've spent your whole life with your head bent over a wishing well...

JOHN
Eve, he didn't go to the interview.

EVE (shaken)
What?!

JOHN
He decided that on his own power, Eve. He went to the city, but he didn't go to the...

EVE
And why didn't he go?

JOHN
No one pushed him off the bus...

EVE
I want to know, John.

JOHN
He was scared, I guess.

EVE (grabbing JOHN by the shoulders)
Why didn't he go?

JOHN
Because he wanted to be with me.

(EVE slaps JOHN's face and then immediately draws back.)

EVE
Did you see that in your dreams, too, John? I always thought you wanted to be a father to Boxer but maybe that wasn't it. You wanted him to be like you. A...confirmation of what's possible and impossible.

JOHN
Eve...

EVE
And where do I fit in to your dreams? Wife of George, mother of Boxer, sister to the creative urges of John?

JOHN
Boxer is disappointed in me.

EVE

Why should he be disappointed? You've always had your dreams at your fingertips. Even if they weren't real you managed to carry them around in your back pocket for 30 years. Or this.

(Indicating the sculpture.)

Another fancy to thrash through, build and nail together. We can all hold our breath to see what you come up with.

JOHN

This is not a fancy. It is a compulsion.

EVE

And you always give in to your compulsions, don't you?

JOHN

No, Eve. No I don't. Why do you think I ran away to fly? Why do you think I went to war?

EVE

Why do you think I waited for you? Why do you think I'm always waiting for you?

(Pause.)

I am not just your mother and your wife and your sister all rolled up into a pair of outstretched arms. I have had compulsions. I have had my dreams as well as you. I had my day in Paris. Just like you.

JOHN

Eve...

EVE

But I had obligations to the people I loved. And the people that loved me. Did you ever feel that way? Maybe you didn't.

(EVE prepares to leave. Long pause.)

I will try to talk to Boxer. And leave you to your family of dead trees.

(EVE exits. JOHN looks after EVE. Long pause.)

JOHN (very softly)

Nora...

(Pause.)

JOHN

Inevitable. In-eve-able.

(JOHN turns to his sculpture. During the next section the lights should dim gradually to indicate approaching evening. The pieces of wood are completely carved and smooth, lying to one side ready to be erected in the space cleared for them. JOHN works slowly and deliberately. The pieces are secured with a good deal of hammering and shifting. As JOHN decides where they should go they are handled gently, lovingly.)

Family of dead trees.

(Pause.)

Wouldn't it be just like you to plant a bunch of dead trees.

(Pause.)

In the cold ground. A family of sweet dead weeping wood. In November. Before the frost.

(Pause.)

When it's too goddamn late for them to grow.
You'll have to be recycled...replanted...
Late frost, long winter. But we'll still be here in the spring.

(JOHN stops. Considers woods for a moment and then continues. Works in silence. JOHN secures the last piece in place. The grouping of trees has formed a family of sorts. There are three figures, tall in the middle, next smallest to one side and smallest on the other side. The statue, or sculpture, is free standing although the pieces seem to depend on each other for support. The effect is quite striking. The figures are tall and gaunt. They have the quality of both a war memorial and a Munch painting.

JOHN continues working on the sculpture, securing the pieces at the base. He does not convey a sense of completion. He begins to hum softly to himself as he continues to work. Lights fade to black.

THE END

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BROADFOOT, BARRY. Six War Years 1939-1945: Memories of Canadians at Home and Abroad. Don Mills, Ontario: General Publishing Co. Limited, 1974.

APPENDIX A:

THE WORKSHOP PROCESS

NORA AT DAYBREAK

Thesis Workshop

Northern Light Theatre

May 11-17, 1982

JOHN.....WENDELL SMITH

EVE.....ELYN ROSS GIBSON

BOXER, YOUNG JOHN.....GRANT CARMICHAEL

YOUNG EVE.....CHERYL HEIKEL

Dramaturge.....Dave Billington

Director.....Brian Deedrick

Playwright.....Conni Massing

I approached the works
deal of trepidation. I had be
junction with a production, bu
formal workshop. In these pre
accomplishing rewrites was pro
I was intimidated by both the
workshop, and more than a litt
In the final analysis, I must
the workshop was an excellent
an attempt to describe the pro
both the design and the actual
done this because I feel that
contributed as much to the suc
itself.

Two approaches could b
first would involve intense di
working toward a performance
method would have entailed li
opportunity to see detailed c
writer could then leave the p
shape and form and make chang
native approach involved exte
the workshop, with far less e
of the staged reading. After
and disadvantages of both styles,
My reasons for this choice were two-fold. I wanted to do as many

The staged reading, although important as a culmination of the week's work, was not to be the focal point of the workshop. This, in turn, influenced the director's choice of actors. Their suitability for the role was far less important than their ability to participate in the workshop in an intelligent and constructive manner.

The function and purpose of actors, dramaturge, director and playwright was another carefully discussed aspect of the workshop design. My personal feeling regarding actors is that they can be both invaluable and troublesome in a workshop situation. The experience of watching an actor apply his skills to a new script yields insights never gained from discussion or reading. On the other hand, I do not believe that actors necessarily have a clear vision of the play as a whole. I am troubled when actors are allowed to manipulate the play beyond the realm of their own character. Thus, it was a highly dangerous and difficult role that the actors assumed in this process. They were given free rein to participate in every aspect of the discussion, insofar as the director allowed and I could escape. I was extremely fortunate in that they exercised both their acting skills and critical judgement in a sensitive way throughout the week. I welcomed their suggestions and learned a great deal from their interpretation of the roles.

The director provided yet another insight into the process and progress of the play. His key function, however, was in guiding the discussions and devising a structure for the daily work. Through his use of scene work, character analysis and table discussion, he helped me to see the play in many different ways. He cleared the occasional stalemate, energised the discovery process and played the roles of arbitrator, mediator and advisor. We worked together to determine the form and structure of the week, and analysed the proceedings of each day in order to plan the next.

The dramaturge was in many ways the most interesting participant in the workshop process. While Dave Billington is an active entertainment critic and commentator, he had no concept as to the role of dramaturge, and had never participated in a workshop before. In our explanation to him of his function, we clarified the role for ourselves as well. He became the objective "eye", and the "in-house critic". He was also the one person sufficiently detached from the process to remind us constantly of our objectives and of the core of the play. His function was to watch, listen and to "police" the operation when he felt that the conclusions or suggestions were inconsistent with the play's meaning. Mr. Billington was fond of referring to this as "dropping a rock in the middle of the pond".

Finally we came to my own function in the workshop. I felt compelled to absorb as much as possible from each day's discussion; to be as truthful as possible in an analysis of its worth; and as effective as possible in executing the resultant changes.

The scheduling of the days was reasonably consistent. Regular rehearsal hours were spent with actors; dramaturgical discussions took place at lunchbreaks and after the day's work. The public reading was scheduled for the evening of the final day and was to be performed with minimal rehearsal props and no set.

The workshop process itself was both exhilarating and exhausting. The experience of having so many voices and minds applied to the script was very exciting. My attempt to capture their suggestions and my ideas in the rewrites was an almost overwhelming task. The script which I brought into the workshop was at the same time skeletal and overburdened. The entire draft was only sixty pages long and the character development, save for John, was minimal. On the other hand, the script was laden with images, motifs and divergent themes. The element most sorely lacking, however, was a strong line of action. In its rough state the play was more akin to a choral poem than to a dramatic work. These were the problems I discovered and attempted to address during the workshop.

The first session of the workshop was spent with two readings of the complete play, followed by a full day of general discussion. The nature and placement of the memory scenes generated a good deal of comment and criticism. The strengths, weaknesses and inconsistencies of the characters were analysed by the actors and discussed by all. The experience of hearing the play in its entirety confirmed my belief that I should attempt to rewrite the play from the beginning.

The following three days were spent working with the first act. During this time I completely rewrote the first act, with the exception of one scene. These rewrites effected a number of positive changes in the script. The characters of Eve and Boxer were deepened and John's motivation for his actions was clarified. The memory scenes became more clearly related to the action in the present and the dramatic line in the first half of the act was strengthened considerable. These first days were the most productive of the workshop. Each day began with the reading of the new material which was subsequently discussed and rehearsed. By the end of the fourth day, however, we decided that we should attempt to spend proportionate time on the second act.

It was at this point that I realized that the first act rewrites had affected a number of elements in the second act which had not previously been problematic. Unfortunately, there was not enough workshop time left to completely rewrite the second act. I had to decide which scenes were most crucial and how best to rework them in the remaining two days. I worked primarily with the middle of the second act and the end of the play. These were, however, cosmetic changes and some major problems were not dealt with in the last days of the workshop. As a result, the second act was not as effective as it might have been. More specifically, the character relationships remain largely unresolved at the end of the play. The line of action, although bolstered by the rewrites, tends to waiver at different points in the play. Thematically, the play is still ambivalent. There are two or three major ideas

competing for central focus.

My general assessment of the workshop's success was that it improved the play immeasurably. I was amazed and pleased at the quantity and quality I was able to produce in the workshop week. Not all of the problems with the play had been clearly addressed by the end of the week and, as always, new problems were created by the changes. I do feel, however, that the play is firmly rooted in strong characters and rich images, and I hope that this will provide a solid basis for further development.